



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

For immediate release: May 16, 2006 (06-18)
Contact: Jim Quigley (360) 902-1833
Mike Louisell (360) 902-1813

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, and Washington 98504-2560
Visit our Web site at: agr.wa.gov

Apple, cherry inspection standard hearings set for Wenatchee, Yakima

OLYMPIA – As the nation's top producer of apples and sweet cherries, Washington growers are interested in keeping stringent grading standards that meet or exceed U.S. Department of Agriculture standards. The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) is conducting a pair of hearings to amend certain standards for apples and cherries, making them more flexible for growers while maintaining the quality of fruit in the marketplace.

WSDA is conducting a public hearing on the proposal to update apple standards at 10 a.m. May 23 in Wenatchee and again at 10 a.m. May 24 in Yakima. The Wenatchee hearing will be held at the WSU Tree Fruit Research Center, 1100 N. Western Ave. The Yakima hearing will be at WSDA's office at 21 N. First Ave.

One of the issues the fruit industry is being asked to comment on involves the Fuji apple, a variety that came to the U.S. via Japan. Horticulturalists from the apple industry are asking that smooth net-like russetting be allowed when grading Fujis. The characteristic appears to be inherent of the Fuji variety and doesn't affect the overall quality of the apple.

Also to be discussed are proposals to allow growers to sell mixed apple varieties in the same package, treat slight scald as brown surface discoloration, and change some definitions to bring Washington in line with U.S. apple grading standards.

Standards are enforced by WSDA's Fruit & Vegetable Inspection Program in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Random samples of apples are tested for color, weight, pressure, sugar, grade and condition, before and after harvest to enforce state and federal requirements.

Hearings on standards for sweet cherries

Two hearings will also be held on a proposal to include light colored sweet cherries, such as the popular Rainier variety, in state standards. If adopted, the new rules would add these cherries to standards concerning size and sweetness (soluble solids). Dark sweet cherries, like Bings and Lamberts, are already included in state standards. The proposal also calls for removing container requirements for all cherries to allow industry to use containers that meet buyer and consumer demand.

The cherry hearings will be held at 1 p.m. May 23 at the WSU Tree Fruit Research Center, 1100 N. Western Ave., Wenatchee, and again at 1 p.m. May 24 at WSDA's Yakima office, 21 N. First Ave.

"In both the proposed rules for apples and for cherries, we're considering ideas to provide more market flexibility for the fruit industry while protecting the interests of consumers," said Jim Quigley, manager of Fruit & Vegetable Inspection Program at WSDA.

MORE

Apple, cherry hearings set for Wenatchee, Yakima
May 16, 2006

Information on proposals are available on the WSDA Web site at
<http://agr.wa.gov/LawsRules/Rulemaking/HearingCalendar.htm>.

Comments on either proposal are due by 5 p.m. on May 24 and may be sent to Debbie Hacker, Fruit & Vegetable Inspection Program, Commodity Inspection Division, Washington State Department of Agriculture, P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, WA 98504-2560; by e-mail at dhacker@agr.wa.gov or FAX to the program at (360) 902-2085.

###